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Adapted by Melissa Lagonegro
from the script "The Gecko's Tale" by Kaita Mpambara

Illustrated by Heather Martinez

A GOLDEN BOOK • NEW YORK

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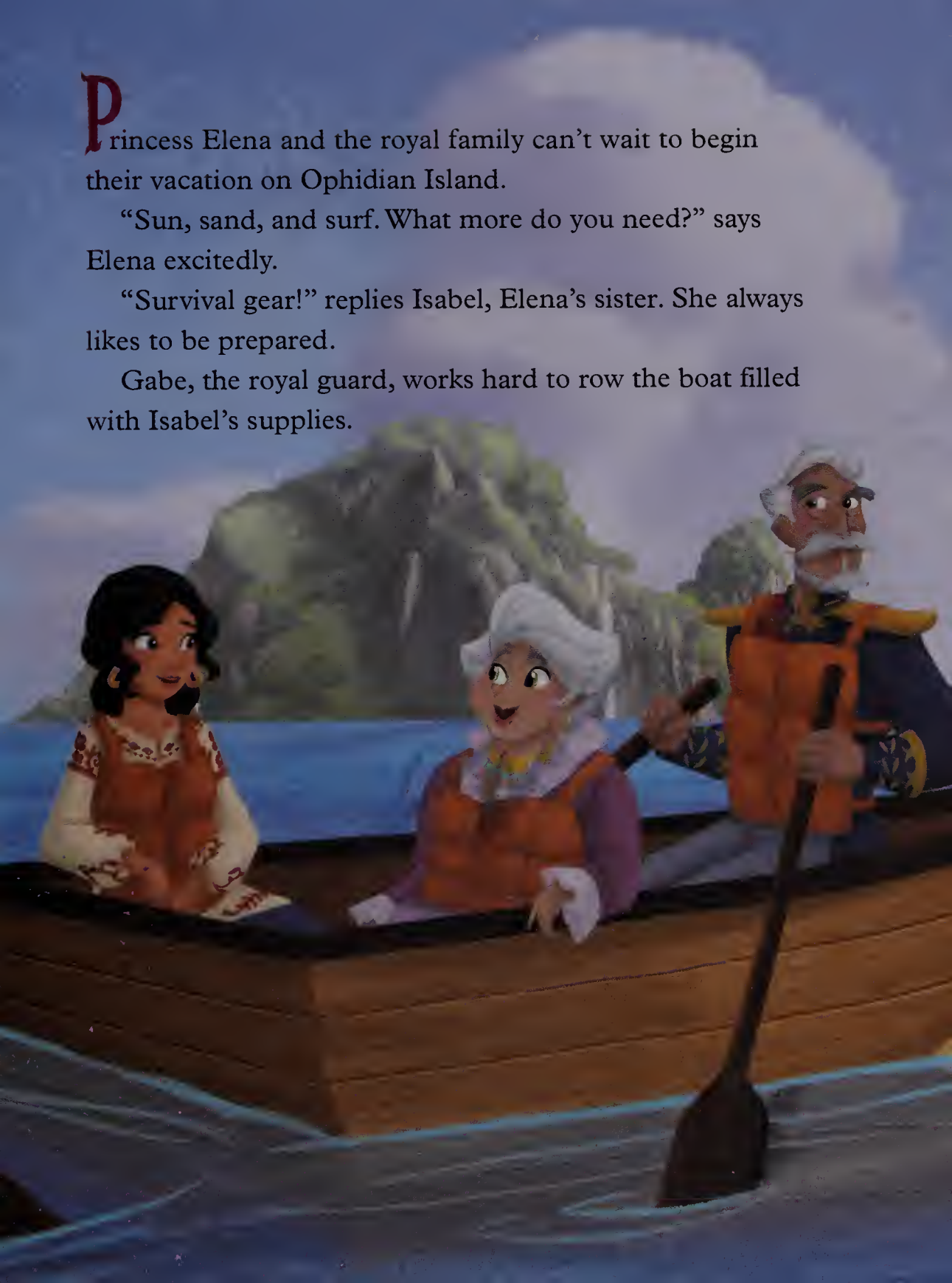
Princess Elena and the royal family can't wait to begin their vacation on Ophidian Island.

"Sun, sand, and surf. What more do you need?" says Elena excitedly.

"Survival gear!" replies Isabel, Elena's sister. She always likes to be prepared.

Gabe, the royal guard, works hard to row the boat filled with Isabel's supplies.



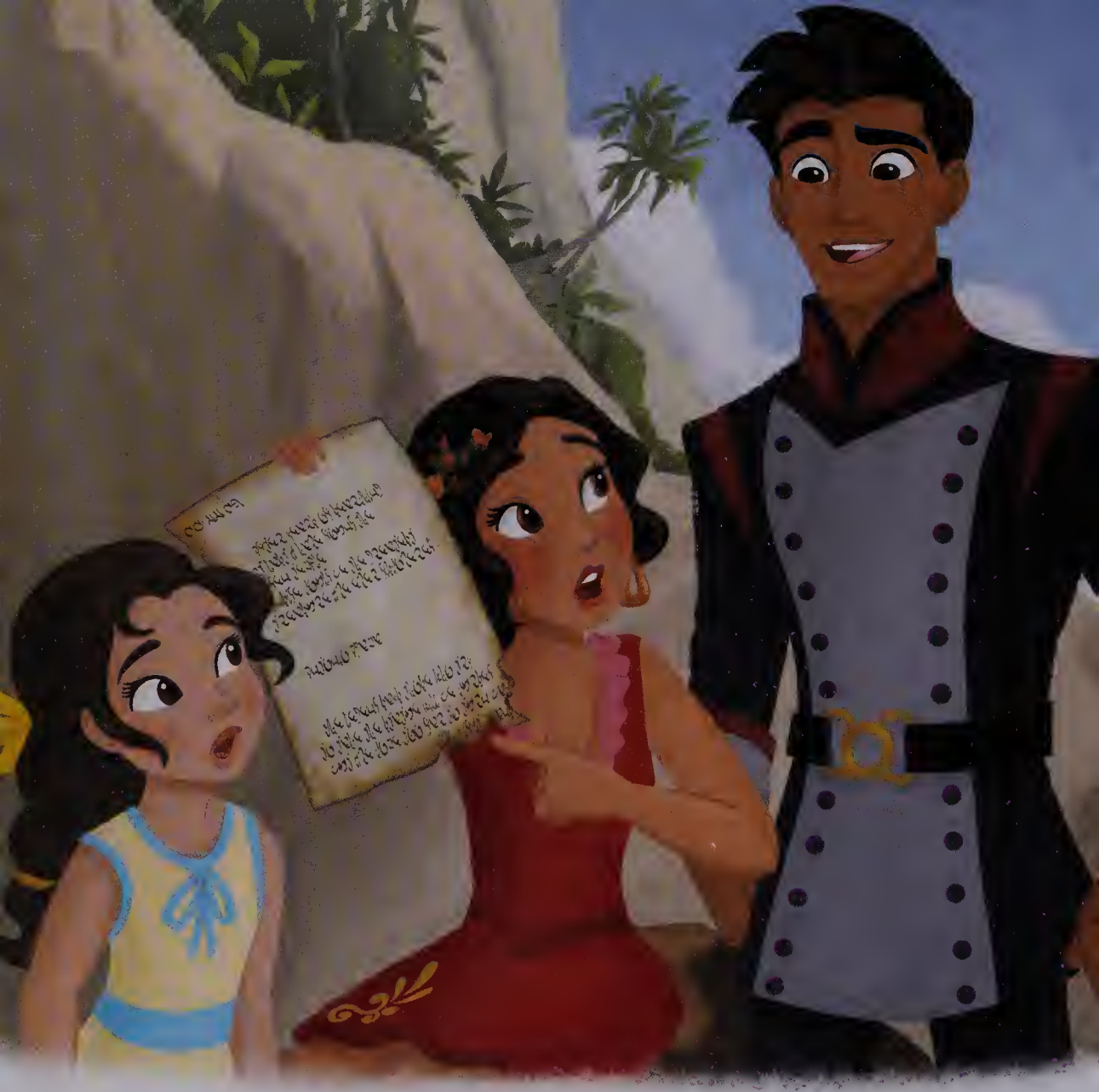
When they reach the island, Elena dives into the water. "All right, Isabel—your turn!" she says.

"Just a second," her sister replies. "I'm calculating the best angle for a smooth entry." Isabel likes to take her time and make plans before jumping into any situation.

Suddenly, a glass bottle floats by. Elena picks it up. "Hey, there's a message inside," she says.

Elena pulls a rolled-up piece of paper out of the bottle and reads the message. It's from the famous explorer Antonio Agama!

"He's one of my all-time heroes!" declares Gabe. "He set off to search for a priceless statue called the Golden Gecko. He hasn't been heard from since."

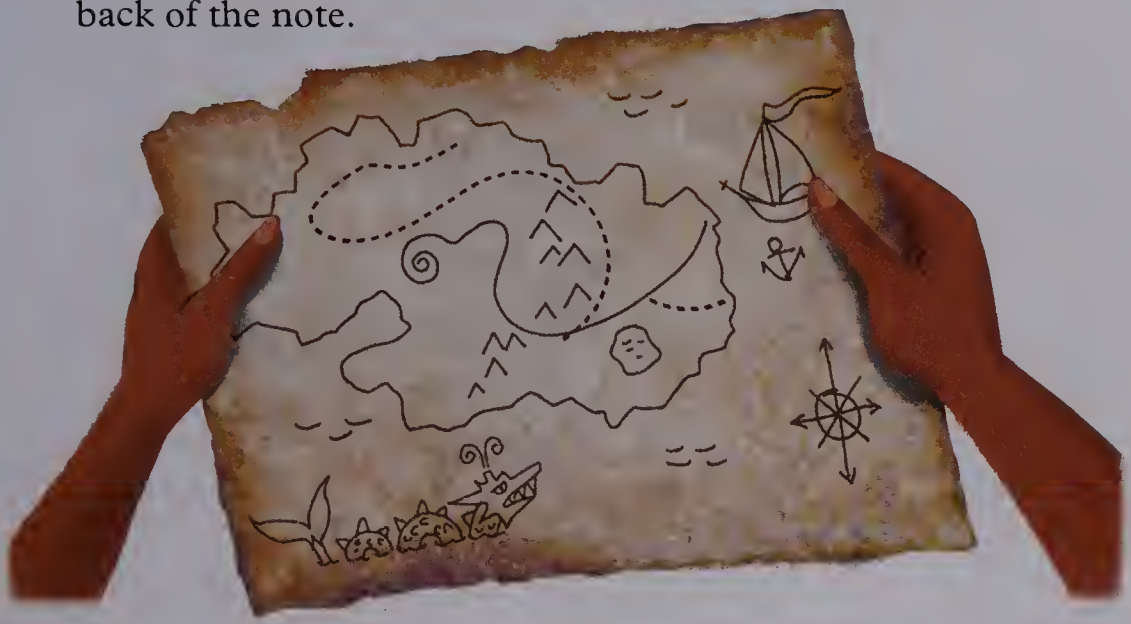


Elena continues reading the note. "'The legend says that those who try to take the statue will be cursed, but I've come too far to turn back. Even if it means—'"

"Means what?" asks Gabe.

"I can't see what else Antonio wrote. The page is torn," replies Elena.

Just then, Isabel notices a map of Ophidian Island on the back of the note.



"Antonio Agama must be somewhere on the island," she says, "and he needs help!"

"We have to find him!" exclaims Elena.

The three set out into the jungle to look for the famous explorer. But before they get very far, a giant gecko jumps out in front of them.

"RUN!" shouts Gabe.

Isabel bolts and almost falls into a huge pit. Suddenly, the giant gecko leaps down from a tree. He wraps his tail around Isabel and pulls her to safety!

"Quick, hide in this tent!" yells Gabe as he bravely tries to protect the girls from the gecko.

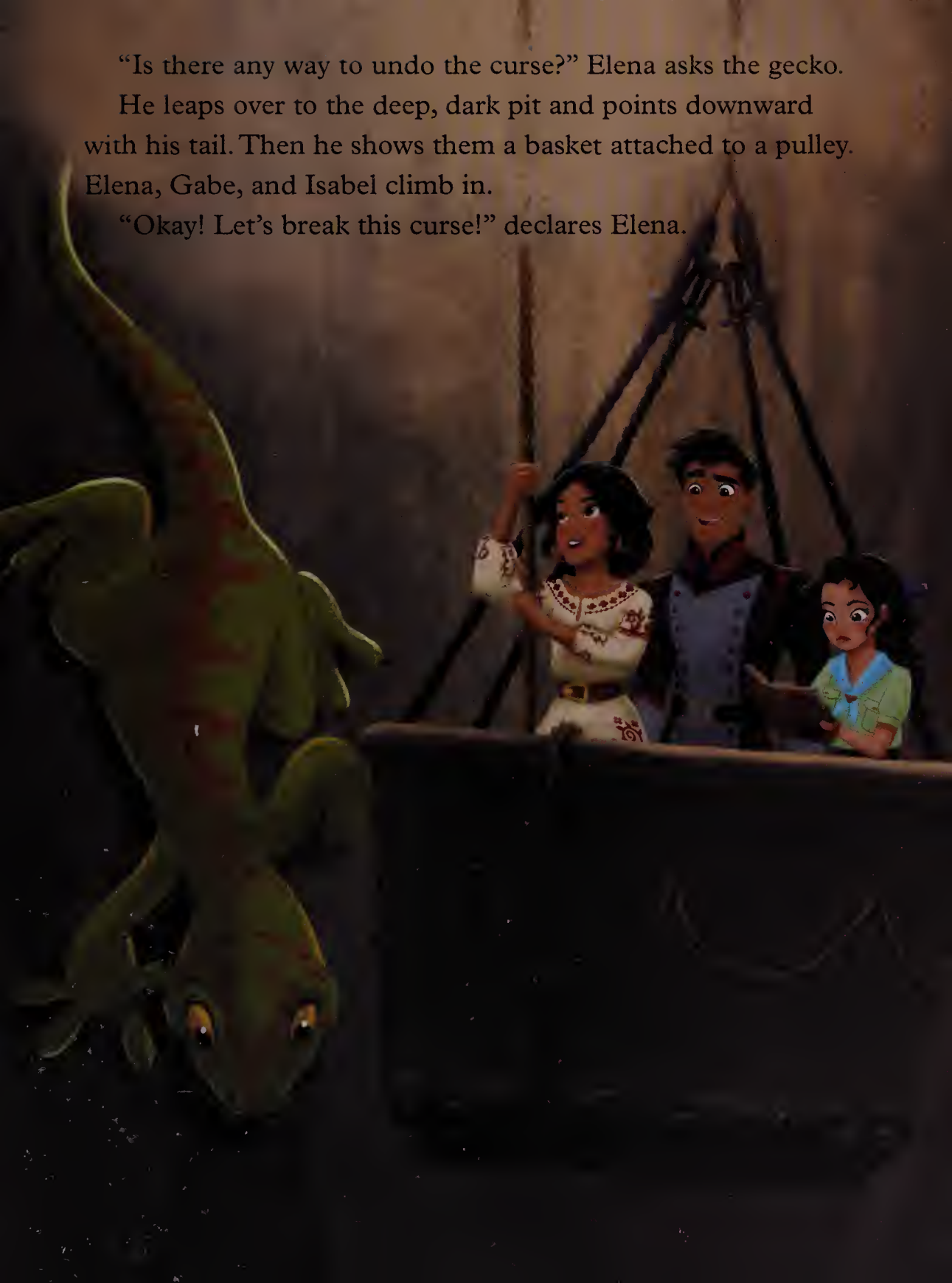
Isabel finds Antonio Agama's journal inside the tent and reads it. She soon learns something amazing.

"That gecko *is* Antonio Agama!" Isabel explains. "He was trying to remove the Golden Gecko statue and was cursed!"

"Is there any way to undo the curse?" Elena asks the gecko.

He leaps over to the deep, dark pit and points downward with his tail. Then he shows them a basket attached to a pulley. Elena, Gabe, and Isabel climb in.

"Okay! Let's break this curse!" declares Elena.



At the bottom of the pit, they come to a giant temple filled with gecko statues.

"Come on!" exclaims Elena, speeding toward a tunnel.

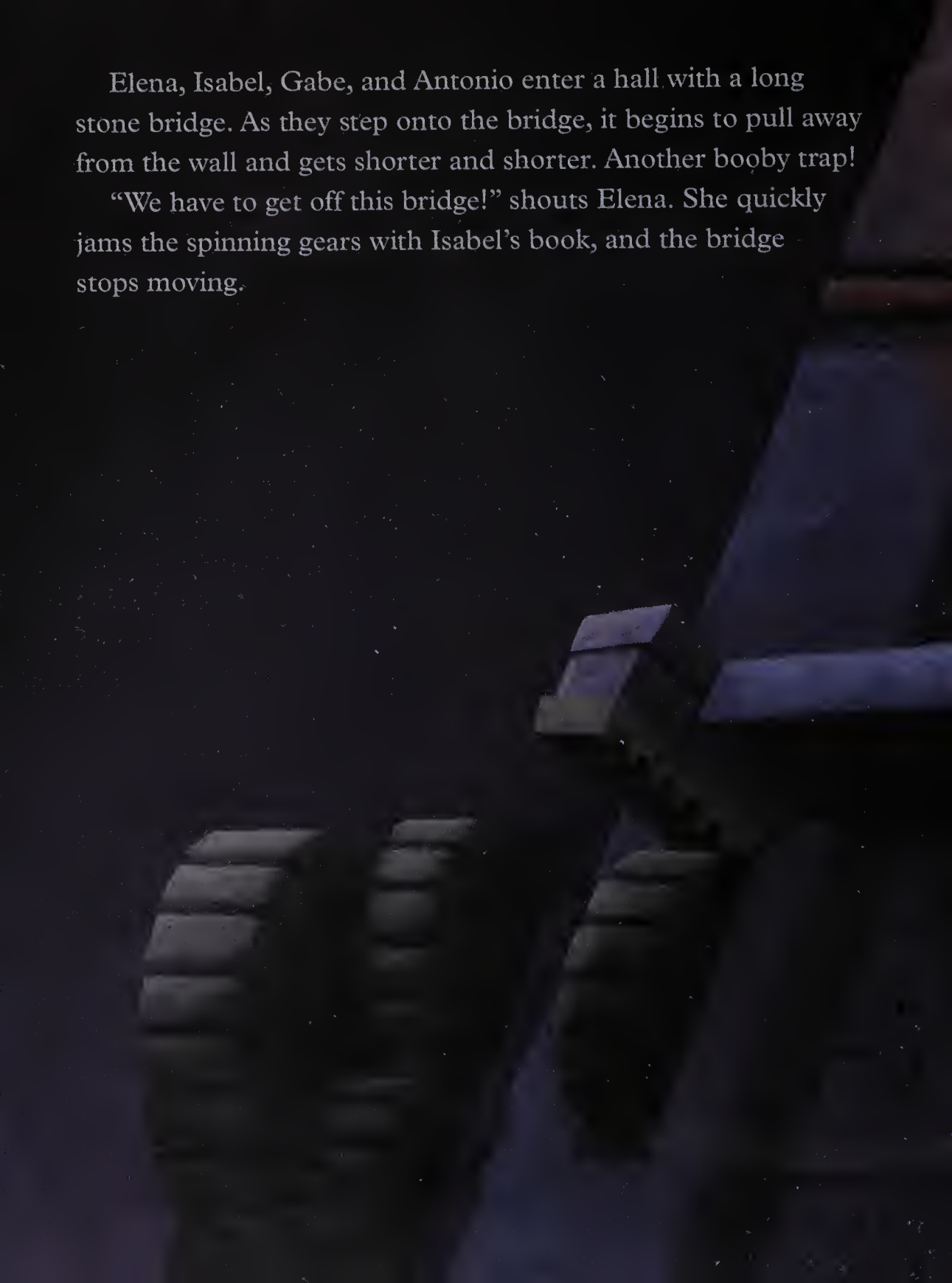
"Slow down!" warns Isabel. "The Ophidians booby-trapped their temples."

Just then, Elena bumps into a rock and sets off a trap. A giant gecko statue chases after them. The friends race out of the tunnel before they are crushed!

"Elena, I told you to slow down," says Isabel. "Let's be more careful."

Elena, Isabel, Gabe, and Antonio enter a hall with a long stone bridge. As they step onto the bridge, it begins to pull away from the wall and gets shorter and shorter. Another booby trap!

"We have to get off this bridge!" shouts Elena. She quickly jams the spinning gears with Isabel's book, and the bridge stops moving.



They escape through another tunnel but find a big gap in the floor.

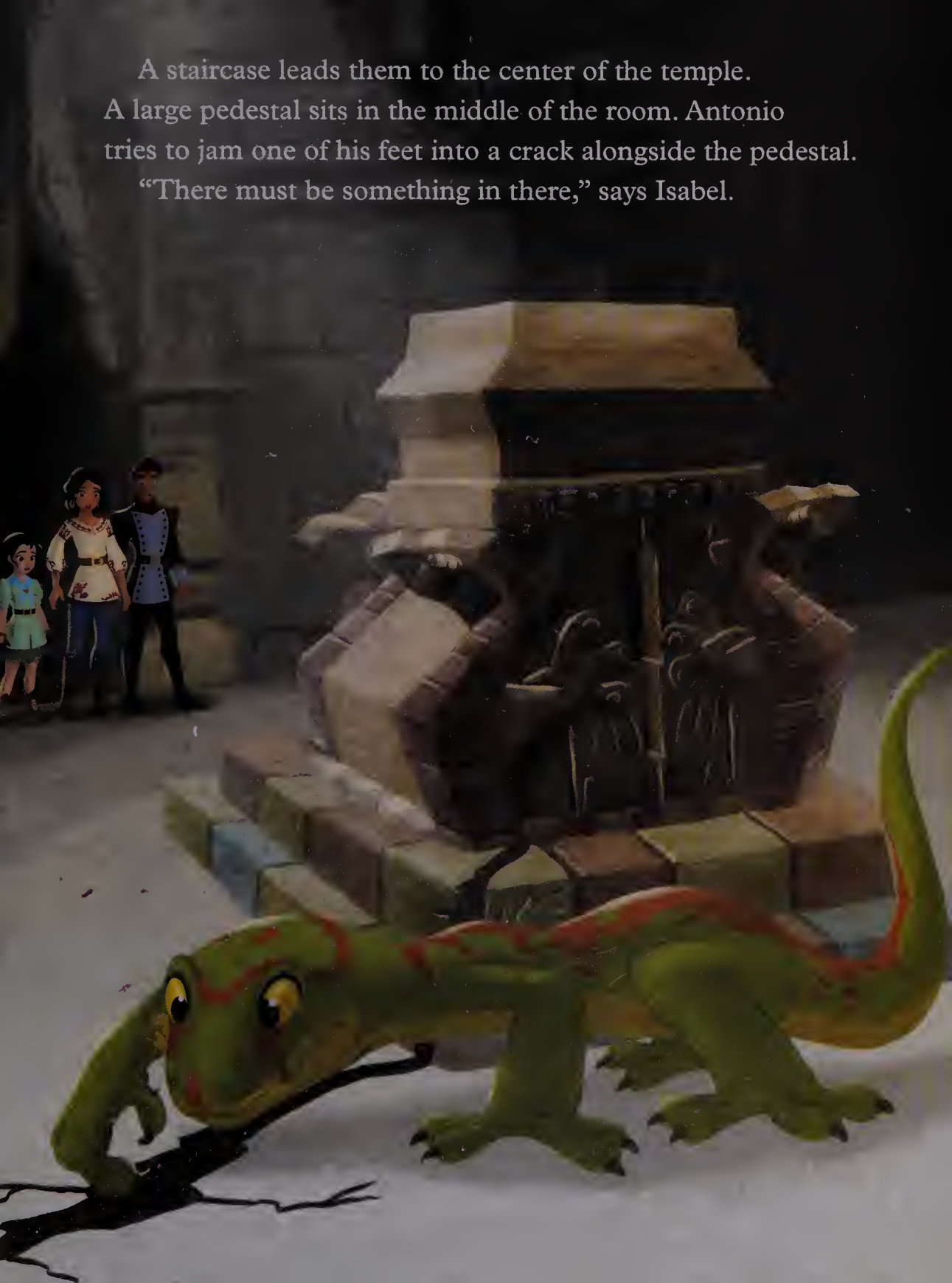
"It's not too far. We can jump it," says Elena, leaping across. Isabel isn't so sure. Elena jumps back to her sister.

"Sometimes you just have to trust yourself and go for it," Elena tells her.

The sisters jump together—and make it safely to the other side.

A staircase leads them to the center of the temple. A large pedestal sits in the middle of the room. Antonio tries to jam one of his feet into a crack alongside the pedestal.

"There must be something in there," says Isabel.



Elena looks into the crack. She reaches in and pulls out the Golden Gecko statue!

"It needs to go back onto the pedestal?" she asks Antonio. He nods. The sisters understand that returning the statue will reverse the curse.

As Elena takes a step, stone slabs begin sliding across the floor. The room becomes a giant maze of walls. It's yet another booby trap! Gabe is trapped in one cell, and Elena and Isabel are trapped in another.

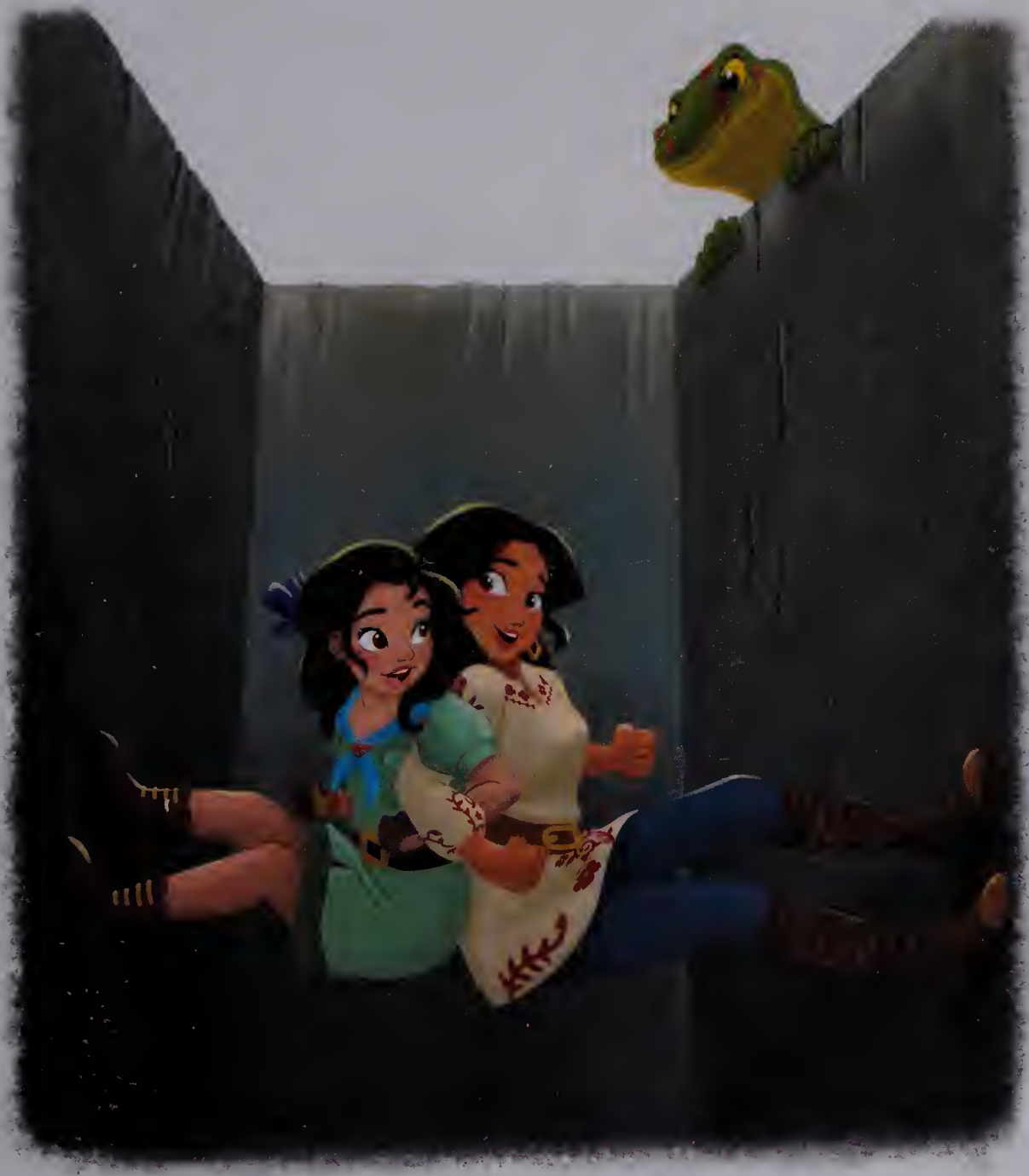
"You wouldn't have so many problems if you weren't always in a hurry!" Isabel yells at her sister.

"It's better than stopping to double-check every single little thing," Elena replies.

Isabel begins to cry. Elena feels terrible.

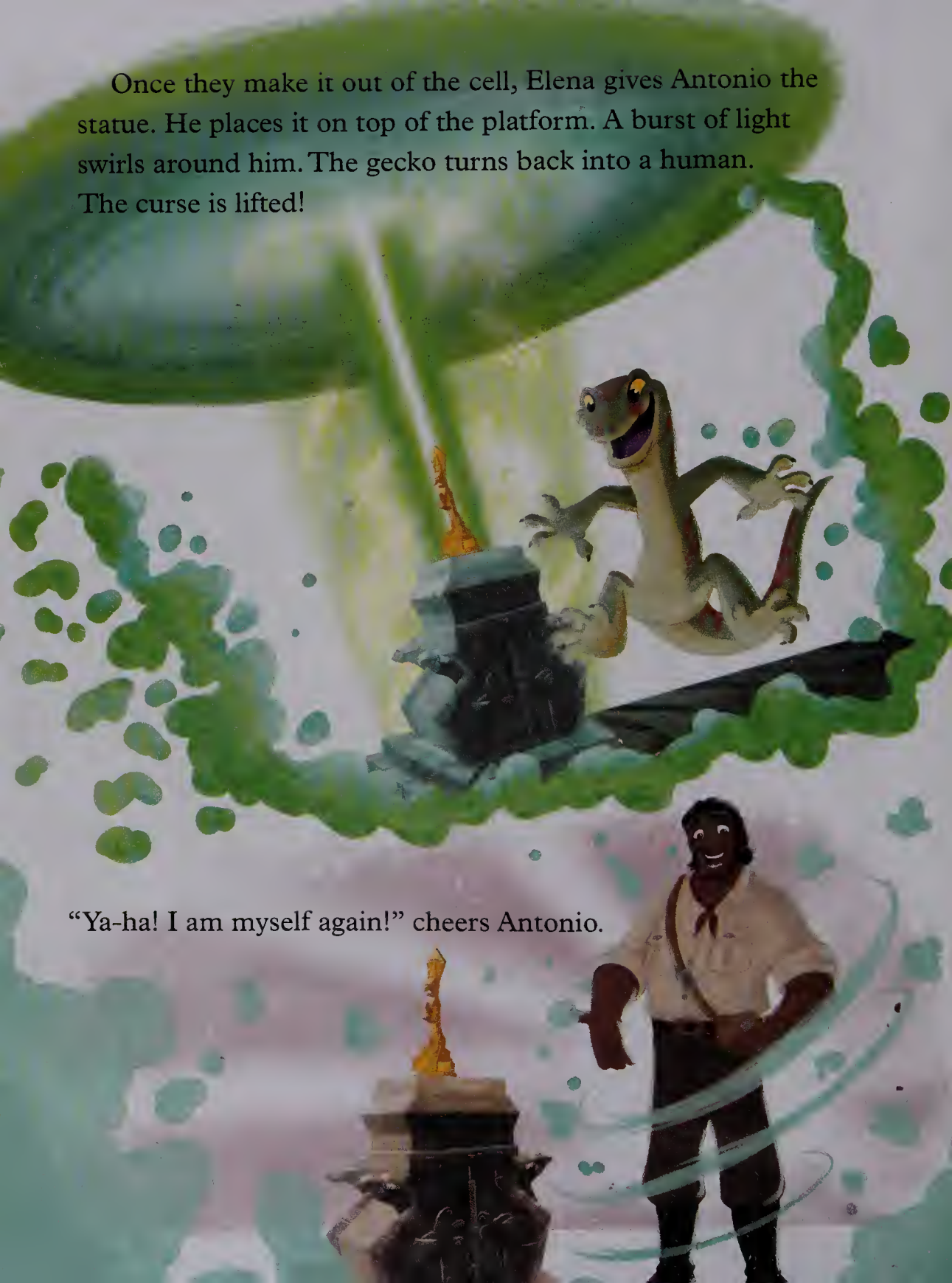
"I'm sorry," she says. "We just have different ways of doing things."

"You're right. I'm sorry, too," replies Isabel.



The girls work together to come up with a plan. Back to back, they crawl out of one of the cells at the same pace.

Once they make it out of the cell, Elena gives Antonio the statue. He places it on top of the platform. A burst of light swirls around him. The gecko turns back into a human. The curse is lifted!



"Ya-ha! I am myself again!" cheers Antonio.

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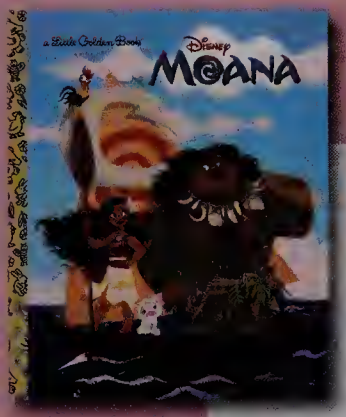

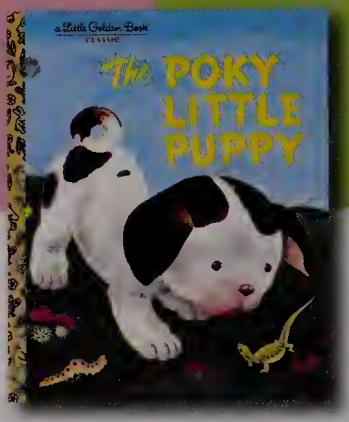

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